

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning Synthesis Report

I. Brief Overview of the Laboratory

The site visit for the Interim Evaluation of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) occurred May 17 - 21, 1999, with a five-person panel accompanied by two members of the staff from Decision Information Resources, Inc. (DIR). The location of the visit was limited to the Lab headquarters in Honolulu, Hawai'i. During the visit the staff made presentations on the organization and its programs, attending particularly to the two selected *Signature Works*. The panel toured the Laboratory facilities and met with the OERI program officer for the Lab. In addition to the PREL representatives who were present in meetings with the panel, several members of the Board, consultants, and clients from education or governmental agencies in the Pacific Region were interviewed by prearranged telephone calls. The questions raised by the panel members to any Lab representative were addressed fully and in ways that appeared to be honest and genuine.

The Lab has been in operation since 1983 as the 10th funded Regional Education Lab (REL), but it was under the direction of the Northwest Regional Educational Lab (NWREL) from 1985 to 1990. Since 1990, PREL has functioned as an independent, tax-exempt corporation that serves their designated Pacific educational community, including: American Samoa; Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap); Guam; Hawai'i; Republic of the Marshall Island (RMI); and the Republic of Palau. Peoples of this region speak approximately 30 indigenous languages,

represent 11 major cultures, and are very sparsely settled, except in part of Hawai`i, where approximately two-thirds of the people of the region reside.

PREL is serving the Pacific Region under a five-year contract with the U.S. Department of Education that began in 1995. This year (1999) is the fourth year of that five-year contract, and the second such contract for the organization. The Lab's main office is in a modern downtown office building in Honolulu, Hawai`i at 1099 Alakea Street, where staff occupy the 24th and 25th floors. These beautiful and comfortable facilities were made possible at very low cost and very attractive conditions through special arrangements with a bank that was closing operations in Hawai`i. In addition to this main office, the Lab has service centers currently operating in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Yap State.

The mission of PREL is "to assist education, government, community agencies, businesses, and labor groups to maintain cultural literacy and improve the quality of life by helping to strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults," and it does not distinguish between its mission *as an organization* (PREL) and the mission of the REL. This very broad mission allows almost any function of the US Department of Education to fit into its purposes. Furthermore, this statement allows the range of needs and clients considered by the Lab to be broadly bounded.

PREL is governed by an active and assertive Board whose members include the ten chief state school officers, or their equivalents, (one from each of the regional entities and one from each of the Federated States of Micronesia) and ten "constituent" members representing important role groups. The Lab began with a single employee, John Kofel, who currently serves as President and Chief Executive Officer. The organization has blended resources from several

sources to provide one, integrated system of services. Among those sources are: USDOE for its REL, planning and evaluation contracts, Pacific Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center, Pacific Mathematics and Science Regional Consortium, PRELStar-Pacific Islands Distance Learning Program, Pacific Vocational Education Improvement Program, and Freely-Associated States Educational Grant Program. PREL has 80 employees staffing these combined programs, with 21 full-time-equivalent employees derived from the REL funding.

This service region covers approximately 4.9 million square miles of the central to western Pacific region crossing six time zones and the International Dateline. The size of the geographic region and diversity of the people served by the Lab have an important influence over its operations. Honolulu is approximately five hours by air from the US West Coast. Guam is seven and one-half hours of air travel beyond Honolulu. American Samoa is a five-hour flight from Honolulu, and travel from American Samoa to all other parts of the region is only possible by flights through Honolulu. The island communities are served by one airline, and the travel options and choices are limited. Flights to and from some entities are every other day. Among the various entities, the average interval between visits by PREL representatives is 30 to 45 days. Both the remoteness of the locations and the infrequent visits result in visits that are longer and provide services that are more intensive than usually provided by RELs.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

1. Strengths

The original proposal for the 1995-2000 funding cycle outlined a set of actions and approaches that would be taken and products that would be produced. The first year was

intended mainly as one during which focus would be on building organizational capacity and re-establishing or developing relationships that would be needed to support work toward the mission. The second year was to be used to focus on developing capacity in the Pacific Region to make changes that were desired and to learn what was needed to document and begin disseminating processes and results. Work in the third year was to result in production, packaging, and dissemination of new knowledge and applications developed by the Lab.

In general, the work outlined for the first two years was completed as planned. The work of the third year depended heavily on documentation of work completed during the first two years. Much of that work has been delayed and other work plans that were expanded are being carried out as arranged with OERI. Some of the delays resulted from technical troubles with media production and with satellite malfunction, and others were a result of expansion of the scope of the original work plan.

Regarding changes from planned work, panel members thought that the inevitable changes in deliverables from those included in a five-year plan proposal, and the schedule for their accomplishment, fall well within reasonable limits. This organization has a complex, sophisticated, and innovative system for assigning responsibilities to staff and accounting for work accomplishments, and “resets itself” during staff retreats twice each year.

PREL made a priority of *capacity building* in the educational communities of the entities (as opposed to scaling up its own products or services). Discussions with and by staff repeatedly highlight this priority. The central approach to Lab work is that, “We do things with people and not to people.” All Lab program areas have local capacity-building modules built into them. Interviews with officials from the entities confirm that this capacity-building is, in fact, occurring.

Indeed, some people interviewed described the Lab as, "... a convener, facilitator, bridge to the federal government, communicator, and translator for the region." They went on to say that the Lab garnered a lot of respect in the region based heavily on the trust that staff have gained over the years and on the sensitivity with which they have provided services in the region. The regard held by clients for the CEO and Lab staff members is very positive.

Members of the panel thought that the fact that PREL selected a *process* as a signature work (rather than a product) reinforced its emphasis on building capacity and a research infrastructure in the region. The rationale for that Signature Work is that the region can only be successful in improving educational outcomes for students if it develops an infrastructure and local capacity to understand, value, and participate in data-based decision-making.

2. Areas of needed improvement

The original proposal outlined a mission that was very broad in coverage and not definite in its statement of expectations. Furthermore, there is little about the statement that distinguishes PREL from any other agency that has a broad purpose to improve schools, schooling, or student learning. Nevertheless, this mission has been maintained as it was originally stated, even though it would be difficult to use for making precise choices among directions, opportunities, or priorities. The *organizational and programmatic goals* that were set do provide more direction and do indicate points of uniqueness of PREL, but those statements have content that is a mixture of tasks and implicit or explicit outcomes. Some panel members thought the Lab could have been more assertive in explaining important differences between OERI's goals for the competition and the uniqueness of the Pacific Region. Had it done so, the connections between its vision, mission, purposes and work might have been made more self-evident.

While those original mission and goal statements were approved by the funding agency and maintained without much change during the first three years of the current contract period, they probably could serve the organization better if they are modified to reflect what actually is expected to be accomplished, to reflect the uniqueness of PREL, and if they are expressed within the context of a strategic plan—a plan that:

- has a clear mission statement that reflects the particular purpose(s) and uniqueness of the Lab;
- clearly elaborates a vision of the region that is actually expected to be in place at some definite time in the future as a direct or indirect results of PREL service, product use, or leadership;
- specifies the strategy—what is planned to be in place that should produce the conditions reflected in the vision; and
- has a results-management system that can be used to monitor the planning and decision-making processes and the degree to which the strategy is being put into place.

Related to the need for a strategic plan, PREL does not seem to have a clear process for allocating its resources to requests for assistance, especially when there are no outside guidelines affecting the particular request. From the perspective of “responsiveness to customers,” this may appear to be a strength; but it should be a matter of significant concern to those who are considering the overall expected impact of Lab actions and resources. A somewhat related matter is that the Systemic Reform Indicators and Scaling Up Indicators outlined in the original proposal seem generally to have received little direct attention, except by the general “capacity building” approach to Lab work.

3. Recommendations for improvement

The panel encourages the Lab to develop and adopt a strategic plan that clearly specifies the mission, vision, strategy(ies) and results-management system that represents what is expected

to be in place as a result of work by the Lab. Once adopted, make that plan apparent throughout the organization and in all Lab communications and work, and implement the results-management system for all products and processes to document better the *results* of Lab work.

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

1. Strengths

The Lab operates, to a great extent, with an approach that is “we don’t say no” and “work *with* clients, not *for* client.” It seems that requests for assistance are denied only if the Lab cannot help for some important reasons. Therefore, requests for services or needs that are expressed by clients are likely to be entered into the planning processes for consideration about how to address the request or expression of need.

The Lab provides for quality assurance in the development of its products and publications through an internal design team that is supplemented with regional experts in the subject area of the product. The process for research and development of products includes an external review, and the products are reviewed internally if they are part of a program or terms of a contract, or if they are for dissemination of information.

Furthermore, the Lab demonstrated a concern for its own organizational effectiveness by conducting an extensive self-assessment study during this contract period. That study was initiated in 1997, and resulted in a report in October of that year. The Lab then commissioned an external panel to review the self-study report. That comprehensive report was reviewed later by staff to determine progress made in implementing the recommendations. All indications to this panel are that Lab staff and leadership took the self-study seriously and are trying to implement

feasible recommendations. The level of candor expressed by staff in those reports indicate an organization that has the capacity for self assessment.

The Lab has a number of routines built into its service and governance processes that assure that systems of services are “customer driven.” Examples among those are:

- Regular times and processes in each meeting of the Board to discuss needs and to introduce new ones into the Lab decision-making;
- Processes in the front-end planning with all entities that identify and clarify the needs to be addressed by the services that are being planned;
- Routine consideration by the R & D Cadre of the needs or interest that are identified and routine processes for the Cadre to make choices from among the options that will be addressed; and
- Periodic surveys of clients to identify needs. Once identified, the priorities that are apparent become central to Lab decision-making

Once an approach has been selected to address a need, the general Lab approach to working with clients—work *with* clients, not *for* clients—has a built-in assurance that the interests or perceived needs of the customer are foremost throughout the process. The Lab operates almost exclusively so that customers are *partners* in planning, delivering, and receiving services. The “customers” influence the services from initial planning through use of the results.

Feedback processes and materials are built into most Lab events in the form of questionnaires or feedback forms. Reported responses are all highly positive. There is ample evidence from the general “customer-driven” approach taken by the Lab that it would address directly any evidence of customer dissatisfaction or concern.

2. Areas of needed improvement

Regarding *customer satisfaction*, the feedback systems that are used depend heavily on questionnaires that are prone to systematic errors from “social desirability” and “generosity in rating,” or both. Furthermore, some response rates to surveys are low (10 percent to some).

Those types of error should be addressed in the design of any feedback systems. It appears that the Lab obtains several other forms of data that are more “qualitative,” but the “quantitative” data tend to be privileged in presentations relating to customer satisfaction and service impact over the qualitative data that may be more difficult to present in neat, summary forms. Nevertheless, the “qualitative” data probably are better fits with the overarching purpose and approach of the Lab, and far more compelling evidence of important effects the panel thought were actually being achieved, than the survey responses that are generally obtained.

Beyond these technical measurement issues, some panel members thought current needs-assessment processes and reports are not as precise or sophisticated as they should be. Also, at least one panel member thought that classroom teachers and their ideas are not represented adequately in the processes for assessing needs.

Regarding the work of the Lab to *serve customer needs*, some members of the panel had concerns about whether the Lab is serving the “right” needs and about whether the processes used for determining needs are best for taking the entities as far as Lab services might take them and for stretching the entities to engage in change as far as they might. (There is some evidence from both the work processes that were described to the panel and from reports of customers that such “stretching” *may* be working for *some* entities; but if that is happening, the general descriptions of processes do not document either how that occurs or the effects that are obtained.)

The primary approach the Lab uses to identify needs is through some form of “expression.” Methods for identification and analysis of “needs” and the validity of the conclusions about what those needs are can be among the most critical determinants of the overall impact of a “needs-driven” organization. Therefore, it is important that processes for

determining needs distinguish the *actual* needs from *symptoms* of those needs. The task to be accomplished in determining needs is similar to determining “root cause” in process problem-solving. That critical task is to determine the “right” condition to address—the “real” needs.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Some panel members suggest that PREL adopt a results-management system that functions within a strategic plan. In the management system, define target accomplishments for all strategic audiences and adopt effective and efficient methods to document progress toward those targets. Assure that those methods represent the highest quality data reasonable considering standards for evaluation, especially *utility*.

Consider adopting a variety of processes for needs identification, including processes such as “environmental scanning,” that allow the Lab to be strategic in addition to being responsive in determining the needs that become organizational priorities. This recommendation is not intended to imply that the Lab should discontinue using its “customer-driven” system for determining the needs it will serve. Rather, it is intended to encourage the use, also, of “large-view” approaches to setting priorities and use of approaches to determine “root” causes of conditions in the region that will be addressed by the Lab.

III. Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?

1. Strengths

PREL expresses a commitment to quality and appears to reflect that commitment in its work. In its *Guidebook for Board of Directors*, it states, “Of course, there is a need to do all work with the highest possible quality. There is simply no substitute for quality work. Quality work is the most important prerequisite to getting more work and giving PREL the best chance to have long-term survivability. This is a PREL-wide responsibility, starting with the board and including every member of PREL’s staff. While the specific nature of PREL’s various programs of work will change over time, the requirements of it will not.”

Consistent with that expression, the Board takes an active role in reviewing plans for products and services and the members express their judgments about expectations for quality and priorities. Furthermore, introduction of a product or service into the planning process usually follows a process of assessment of needs and interests. These processes usually result in definition of a clear purpose and audience for the product or service, providing direction for its standards.

To provide quality product-development and service-delivery, the Lab has assembled a staff with strong credentials and experiences in their work areas. These staff operate within an adopted and monitored *Quality Assurance Process* as they go about development of materials or products. This process includes a review of the related literature, extensive internal review, and external review, depending on the type of product or material. General and specific quality and cultural appropriateness are included in these reviews. The quality of the product is monitored throughout development at appropriate stages. The favorable reputation of the Lab has allowed access to a wide range of external specialists to assist in the development or to serve as external reviewers. In cases in which the products or materials are being developed for a particular entity or constituency, leaders or representatives of that entity or constituency usually are partners in the development process.

As an apparent result of these quality-assurance processes, the Lab's products and services are perceived by its constituents and by national organizations to be high in quality. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that the Lab is willing to change materials when they don't fit the purpose or cultural context as expected. Examples include modification of CEDaR publications and changes made in the RAPSTA study when the cultural nature of stress became evident. The Lab appears to be increasing in the degree to which it is recognized for its products,

programs, and services as it makes contributions to cross-REL efforts.

PREL has developed a wide range of materials that were identified as important by a particular entity. While considering these projects, the Lab tries to avoid duplication of products by conducting literature reviews at the beginning of each project. The Lab has worked with the entities and with other PREL components to prepare materials of the highest quality that could be justified given the resources and quantity needed. Examples are books published mainly for one entity, when they had no such books in their native languages. There is a high level of customer satisfaction with these materials, indicated from surveys.

The Lab helps other service systems, including other RELs, with their dissemination by translating works into languages that are used in the region and into levels of language and formats that are accessible to the Lab audiences. In some cases, the Lab has supported or facilitated work to prepare materials that were important to an entity, but which would not have been commercially viable because of small market size.

Several of the types of service provided by the Lab are in a form that has both the high intensity and duration needed for important results to be achieved. Some of these services are by design and others are by necessity. For one example, staff visits to some entities may be for several weeks at a time, during which planning for some change might occur, followed by training, trial, and technical assistance on implementation. Also, in conjunction with other PREL components, partners, and entities, the Lab operates:

- internship programs in which people from the entities work in the Lab;
- programs in which principals from other entities are mentored by principals in Hawai'i; and
- an R & D Cadre whose members receive training in research methods, plan research with PREL partners, collect data, help with data analysis, and participate in data analysis, interpretation, and planning for use of the results.

To build a framework for the goal of “capacity building” in the region, the Lab works with entities on long-range planning. That work encourages customers to think in terms of goals and priorities, rather than in terms of events or actions. This point was illustrated well by one customer who reported that the new five-year plan for his entity included a mission, goals, and vision statement, rather than a list of things to do, as they had in the past—a change directly attributed to the Lab.

2. Areas of needed improvement

Much of the service provided by the Lab is in the form of consultation, technical assistance, or process facilitation. These types of service depend heavily on professional expertise, often delivered in-person to individuals or small groups. Such a service system almost certainly will reach the limits of Lab capacity to deliver long before all the needs of the region are met. If a service-oriented system, such as PREL, is to be influential in meeting needs of a massive audience while having limited resources, it will need to adopt strategies that have a high potential for meeting needs within the planned time frames with resources that actually are available. That approach usually requires careful definition of the target audiences and strategic selection of “points-of-service” to have maximum expected long-term impact.

To adopt such a strategic approach to capacity-building, the Lab is encouraged to move beyond a delivery system that depends heavily on continuing face-to-face, on-site assistance at a basic service level (i.e., classroom or school). To make those shifts, the Lab will need to document its professional service systems and define those systems as its “products” for dissemination. Such a documentation might be based on definitions of the models used for analysis of situations and models for analysis of the phenomena considered in professional-service delivery.

It appears from several presentations to the panel that the Lab recognizes a need to document its service systems so they can be disseminated and so the specialists can work more efficiently. Furthermore, the Lab sometimes speaks of using a “trainer-of-trainers” approach to service delivery. To the extent that this approach is to be used, the Lab almost certainly will need tools that the trainers can be trained to use and then trained to train others to use.

The focus of the Lab on service delivery, notwithstanding, there is not compelling evidence that the same careful attention given to the development of *products* is given to the development and delivery of *services* (consultation, workshops, and presentations). Standards of quality are not clear for services such as consulting, workshops, presentations, and for staffing events.

Furthermore, even though there is ample evidence that the Lab seeks to develop high quality products and services, it is not so clear what strategies the Lab uses to determine the extent to which the products or services *actually* result in their desired effects—effective school change or improvement in the quality of educational services, for example. To illustrate, in regions where the RAPSTA study have been implemented, it is not clear what changes have actually occurred or how evidence will be collected to show change, if any, in school practices regarding teacher and administrator retention. (It should be noted here that the issue being raised is lack of *documentation* of processes and the system for assurance of process quality, and not the actual quality, itself. While the panel members felt comfortable with the processes and apparent outcomes of Lab work that were described to them, there is, nevertheless, little objective evidence of those effects that can be presented quickly and convincingly. That matter needs to be addressed by PREL.)

The Lab develops syntheses of research literature for dissemination and use in its training

and technical assistance work. These documents become the foundational knowledge bases for Lab work in the particular fields in which it works (for example reading). Most of these documents are based on current national literature in the respective field, and tend to reflect the patterns of study in those fields. A great deal of that “knowledge base” in education dealing with learning and instruction is based on correlational studies that are presented within the reports as if they provide *causative* information. Some panel members urge the Lab to be cautious in its use of “principles” derived from correlational data, and discourage continued dissemination of inadequate or inappropriate interpretations of data from that literature. Furthermore, at least one member of the panel was not sure that the patterns of correlations that were reported in the studies would be the same in the populations of the region served by PREL.

Furthermore, some panel members thought that Lab research met reasonable standards for “action research,” but that not all seemed to be consistent with standards that normally are expected for “juried” research. The Lab provides training for those with whom it engages in action research, but appears not to maintain strict controls over how they actually work in the field. Some examples are not using interview protocols consistently and using questionnaires with apparent weaknesses in an R & D Cadre study (RAPSTA). Standards for juried research should be applied to any studies conducted by staff members, and the action research conducted by people in the entities should meet the highest standards needed for validity of information for the intended decisions to be based on the obtained information.

The Lab has begun to use a wide range of specialists in its work. While some of those people seem to be widely-respected leaders in their field, it was not clear to the panel how these people are selected. It also was not clear how the quality of their expertise is judged and how the quality of service received from the specialists is judged.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Most panel members thought the Lab should adopt a system for documenting its service systems and adopt a process for assuring quality of its services, *as it does its products*. Within this system for assuring quality of services, the legitimate role of both external and internal specialists should be defined and standards for assuring the highest quality of technical and professional expertise should be included.

The panel suggests that PREL develop and use a set of criteria for selecting experts that will free the Lab from any *appearance* of exclusive reliance on personal networks to identify people who bring unique skills, reputations, and knowledge to the Pacific region.

The Lab is encouraged to adopt a strategic view for service delivery that gives careful attention to determining the best audience for each service goal and that allows consideration of each service request in respect to its value for achieving the mission of the Lab.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by the Laboratory useful to and used by customers?

1. Strengths

The Lab has developed and maintains a large number of partnerships throughout the entities. Through a relatively small amount of resources allocated for their significant value received, the Lab supports these partners who have goals that support or parallel the PREL goals through both advocacy for the partners and by providing direct services to them. The results appear to be a substantial extension of the Lab's own impact by helping the partners make accomplishments toward their own goals and, thus, toward the Lab mission.

Also reflecting the approach of “service through partnerships” and “capacity building,” the Lab works directly with the entities in, among other areas, curriculum development, materials development, research, organizational development, and strategic planning. The methods used in this work engage the customers as partners in the processes. Issues of utility for the customers and interest-in-use are ongoing parts of service delivery. The Lab works with partners in ways that allow those interests to guide the direction of their work. As an apparent result, the products and services that are provided become comfortable to the customers to the point that they view them much as if they are their own work.

To a great extent, the focus of the Lab is on developing the capacity of its customers to meet their own needs, using the services of the Lab without developing a dependency upon them. These processes engage the customers directly, and often intensively, in the service being provided. An apparent outcome of the work of the Lab that was expressed by several people interviewed is the development of *Identity of the Pacific Islanders*. They feel that people and agencies elsewhere, especially on the US Mainland, now know they exist. Also, the people of the region served by PREL have come to know each other. The Pacific Educational Conference (PEC) seems to have played an important part in linking people within the region and engaging them in work that they perceive to be both seen by others and recognized by others as important.

The entities use PREL to help develop comprehensive plans for their agencies. Each entity prepares a schedule of Lab services and of their own work related to the Lab services. Reports that these tasks are completed quickly is evidence of the importance that people in the entities place on the services. Workshop materials show interactions with users and include many testimonials about their utility. Furthermore, panel interviews with customers and board members confirm that the Lab’s activities are almost always perceived to be useful to, and used

by, customers. While some of these services take place over a relatively short time frame, most are designed to have long-term effects. These expected long-term effects appear to be assured by the positive rapport established between educators in the entities and PREL leaders and staff.

Another indicator of the utility of PREL's services is the relationship developed with a variety of partners. Some of these relations are focused on particular entities while others focus on larger geographic regions. For some examples, in several entities, a writer's institute has taught teachers to write primary-language books that have been published once they are written; in Kosrae, the Lab helped develop a new system for teaching reading; in Hawai'i, it has worked with a drug education program and with reading programs; in CNMI, a local history text was developed together with the ministry of education. Some of these services are region-wide: the Pacific Isles in Communication (PIC) project has provided the region with videos funded by PBS; and the PALM CD-ROM project is preserving significant primary-language print materials that were in danger of being destroyed by the climate conditions.

Another major service provided by PREL that is particularly "user-friendly" is the Annual Pacific Educational Conference (PEC). For the Lab, the overarching priority of literacy is reflected in the creation of a strand of presentations both in a pre-conference and in the conference itself. The PEC puts the needs of the region first; "resume building" is not a major purpose for those who present or attend. As a result, the educators (and parents who attend) of the region feel that the PEC meets important needs for them (as confirmed by surveys and interviews).

In this area of utility, some members of the panel thought that the Lab's communication throughout the region should "win an award." PREL has developed several vehicles for broad dissemination, including a web site that is easy to use and kept up-to-date. A regular publication,

the *Update*, which is distributed to all educators in the region, presents topics such as innovative ideas and short summaries of research and of events. Briefing papers have evolved over time to their present five-and-a-half page summary of the information in a particular area. These bulletins provide a level of detail that is adequate for understanding, but not so great that they are only readable with significant effort.

2. Areas of needed improvement

There appears to be a continuing issue with identification of Lab customers, both generally and for particular products or services. It is quite possible for an agency to serve multiple customers, but usually the services can be designed and implemented more effectively and with more confidence of the intended impact if a particular customer (at least primary) is determined for each product or service. The *primary* customer for services or products should be determined from the assumptions about the highest levels of change that are desired and how those changes are likely to occur.

The PEC is an important element of the Lab service system that engages large numbers of people in the region to some degree. While it is clear that the conference has helped create identity for and within the region, and has provided significant staff development and professional growth for many people who attend, it seems that the conference may be an important “missed opportunity” to have even more impact on regional and Lab purposes than it does now. Particularly, with a major Lab goal of developing regional capacity, several important dimensions of the conference can contribute directly to that goal if the PEC is placed into a strategic initiative with each significant event designed to have optimum impact.

Some panel members thought the PEC had elements that needed improvement if it is to meet its potential impact. The Conference has strands of presentations both in the pre-conference

and in the conference itself. However, the efficacy of those strands *as staff development* is left to chance in that the presenters tend to be those who choose to present, without particular attention to evidence of their ability to present or of relevance of the particular topic to a strategy for staff development. Furthermore, participants may or may not follow a strand in attending sessions.

Another matter of concern to the panel was that the use and usefulness of some products and services could not be readily determined from the documented data that were available. As an example, in a report dated 1/31/98, the Lab stated that “staff...coordinated assistance to establish a long-term training-of-trainers project on language assessment...of Limited English Proficient students.” No further information about this project was found in reports. Also, some of the long-term projects, such as the RAPSTA study, appeared to begin with a clear and important focus, but by the time studies were completed, it was not as clear that those issues remained as important to the entities as they were when the project began. Interviews with some of the entity representatives indicated lack of clarity about how the findings would be useful. As another example, the Ebeye School project in the RMI seems to be having some important impact, but there does not appear to be a clear Lab strategy for achieving its goals or for disengaging from the project at some optimum time.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Clarify customers for each Lab initiative, and build the PEC into Lab strategic planning and results-management systems. For projects with expected long-term engagement, adopt a plan that has “abort” or “redirection” points throughout in case the information about importance or feasibility should indicate such a need for change.

The panel recommends that the Lab adopt an overall approach to operations that is both strategic and includes resource-allocation guidelines that are grounded in the expected value of

any product or service that is under consideration.

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

1. Strengths

It appears that the overarching approach to service delivery by the Lab is toward meeting customer needs. A great deal of the Lab work engages the customers as partners in the service-delivery process. This approach, which appears to be a signature strength of the Lab, is illustrated throughout the sections above.

A statement made by one panel member illustrates the general view of the Lab's approach to serving its customers that was held by all panel members:

Historically, to focus on the needs of the educational communities of the various entities within the Pacific region has not been characteristic of agencies and institutions that have worked in or conducted studies within this region. However, this REL has distinguished itself by consistently focusing on the unique and specific needs of the entities within the region. This, in turn, has resulted in the established positive reputation of the Lab within the region, which is allowing for continued and greater degrees of success.

One of the strategies used by the Lab to guide its focus on customer needs is continuous and sustained needs-assessment activities. The Lab conducts these assessments through surveys of educational leaders, practitioners and professionals, various focus groups, strategic-planning groups, on-site discussions, and data-collection efforts with school and community groups.

Frequency of contacts with constituents is very high, especially considering the distance among entities of the region, and every effort appears to be made by the Lab to maintain visibility in the region by providing services that are seen as needed by individuals, schools, or school districts. For example, the Lab is working with several entities in their efforts to “preserve our culture.” This topical area to focus service has significant value for maintaining identity

since there is an apparent interest of the customers to engage in the work and to attempt to use the results. One panel member described the Lab's customer approach in another way, saying,

PREL's products are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the entities it serves. This means that customer service is real, not a surface imitation of service. Furthermore, the Lab's products are carefully constructed to have a level of detail that permits use by all educators across the region, whether minimally educated (for an educator) or well educated. ...when PREL receives a request, it tries to find a way to get that request fulfilled — even if it cannot fill the request itself. In this way, it tries to make sure its customers are always served.

2. Areas of needed improvement

As indicated in another section, needs are mainly identified by some form of expression, often through questionnaires. Adopting a strategic approach to meeting needs of the region will require the Lab *to be strategic* in identifying needs and setting priorities. Some form of generalized “environmental scanning” process, matched with serious analyses of the “root causes” of conditions revealed, should be considered. Otherwise, there is a significant danger that the Lab will focus on individual units of service or products, particular projects, or single entities at the expense of overall impact on the region. It may attend to *symptoms*, while the *real* needs go unmet.

Despite its clear demonstration of attention to and identity with its “customers,” most of the panel concluded that PREL is unclear about who its customers *actually* are. To the extent that the customers are “all educators in the region,” the Lab seems to focus on providing service to those who request service, which tends to be mainly Education Agencies in the outlying entities and, to a lesser extent, elementary school educators. It seems less focused on those customers or potential customers who, while great in numbers, are not overtly requesting service, particularly from the State of Hawai'i, the Territory of Guam, and secondary-level educators. PREL staff readily discuss the “non-receptiveness of the education bureaucracies” in Hawai'i and Guam,

and rarely mention services to high school educators.

Nevertheless, data indicate that the Lab does, indeed, provide significant amounts of services to these entities or agencies. Examples, among others, include the peer coaching workshops at Waianae High School and contracts with individual schools in Hawai'i, usually in a partnership relationship. Lack of clarity of customer, strategy, and goal appear to cause difficulty among the Lab staff in describing these initiatives and their effects.

The panel concluded that the Lab also has difficulty identifying its customers because it has such a large number of areas listed as priorities (for example, 32 are listed in the *Report of the 1998 PREL Staff Review of Recommendations from the 1997 External Peer Review Report*). Furthermore, at least one panel member said that the Lab has trouble identifying its customers who reside outside of Hawai'i because it works mainly through the ministries of education, with teachers not well represented in the needs-assessment processes (even though the Lab stated teachers were its main customers).

While there is a significant amount of Lab service provided in Hawai'i, the *identity* of the Lab appears to be with the entities in the region other than Hawai'i. Yet by far the largest portion of the population of the service region lives in that state. Several barriers to working with the state were given as reasons. Nevertheless, those barriers appear to be as much a part of the culture of that state as are the traits of the cultures of the other entities served. An organization that claims successes working in various cultures might reasonably be expected to be able to provide planned and *strategic* services to the entity with the largest population in its region.

Because of the nature of the region and characteristics of some of the services delivered, some of the products and services of the Lab are high in cost per unit. Throughout all Lab work, care should be given to considering carefully the *opportunity cost* of each product or service as it

is being considered for adoption—what else might be accomplished with these resources if they are used for some other product or service rather than this particular one.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Clarify Hawai`i as a part of the overall *identity* and *strategy* of the Lab, and reflect that decision-making in Lab operations and communications.

Adopt methods for determining needs that are strategic, representing both the uniqueness of the region and the entities, and also an overarching approach to achievement of service goals for the region.

Distinguish needs, priorities, goals, and strategies in the process for clarifying customers. Clarify the system for setting priorities in the context of strategic operations.

Adopt an operational measuring systems for all Lab objectives, set outcome targets for all projects, and prepare to document effects of work so that the impact of the Lab can be known to the Lab and readily demonstrated to others.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

1. Strengths

The panel recognizes that the Pacific region is one of the lowest on student success of all regions in the United States, its territories, and its associated states. Spencer, in her study of Micronesian people, found widespread illiteracy, both in English and in the primary languages. She further noted that instructional methods that are in place in the region are largely ineffective. These conditions described by Spencer seem to support the overall approach taken by the Lab to

focus its work on the development of capacity to improve educational services of entities throughout the region.

The approach to building capacity of the systems to provide educational services for all children and to improve the quality of educational services is a long-term effort, and should not be expected to be reflected in student performance indicators until developments occur at the system level and are then deployed to the instructional levels. The capacity-building intervention that is *directly* related to the teaching-learning process is mainly through development and dissemination of products (print, video, and computer based) and providing services such as workshops, presentations, and seminars for school staff.

Despite this strategy (and probable reality) of long-term expected student impact, the need for enhanced student achievement is clearly great and the current national agenda demands that improvement take place within short times after start-up of services. While the national timeline probably is unrealistic in much of the region, it cannot be ignored. Neither can the enormity of the task be used as a rationale to avoid attention to improving student achievement. PREL seems to understand the importance of attending to student achievement, that a “Band Aid” approach will not work, and that no single approach to increasing student achievement will work throughout the region.

Intensive work in schools by the Lab is focused mainly on Ebeye, RMI, where the Lab is helping transform a school into one with “common ownership” by the school staff and community. Intensive staff development services are being provided in that school, and preliminary student performance measures indicate gains being made in targeted curriculum areas.

Lab evaluation reports show that the quality of work at school development sites was

rated as highly effective by customers. Eighty-eight percent of partners stated that Lab services do contribute to comprehensive school reform. While the Lab and its clients report the *belief* that schools and school systems are making improvements and that student achievement is improving, there is little direct, objective evidence to document most of these changes.

It has been difficult to document student performance in the geographic region served by PREL, partly because of the general absence of data on student performance in the region and partly because there previously have been no measuring systems to assess primary language literacy in a new orthography. The PREL PLUS study of the R&D Cadre is attempting to create instruments that can serve those purposes. Other instruments appropriate to assess student achievement in the region need to be found or developed. PREL has begun working at its Ebeye site to develop, adopt, or adapt such measuring procedures.

2. Areas of needed improvement

It is easy to build a case that capacity-building in the Pacific Region is an important goal of a service system such as the Lab. Furthermore, it is just as easy for services to be delivered all over the Pacific region without ever knowing what capacity actually has been built. It seems imperative for Lab decision-making and planning that it elaborate its strategy for capacity-building, including identification of targets within its audiences and specific capacity benchmarks from the highest decisions to classroom practices. Such a plan could be added to the Lab results-management system that is needed. (Of course these targets might be unique for each entity or major partner, but fit into an overall system for classifying and documenting accomplishments.)

As in other goal areas, PREL began its work toward improving literacy in the region by reviewing the literature. In that review the Lab studied the literature of teaching reading to

students whose primary language is not English. However, some panel members think this review needs to be extended to include an examination of what has been discovered about improving literacy in other communities in which English (or in some cases Standard English) is not the language of everyday communication but in which English is the language of educated discourse. Among others to include are isolated American Indian and Inuit communities, Caribbean Islands, India, Singapore, Canada, and Australia.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Develop a “map” of the strategic approach to building the capacity of the region, including benchmarks, and include the plan in an overall Lab results-management system. Adopt ways to document, measure, and report all significant expected outcomes of Lab programs.

The panel agreed that the Lab is becoming more recognized nationally as a significant contributor to information and services for educational improvement. Nevertheless, it thought the Lab should look more globally at its mission and be less regional in its views about the uniqueness of its work with the entities. There are many similarities of the cultures and contexts of the region to many other settings to which Lab materials and processes might be applied.

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

1. Strengths

The overall approach to working with education entities appears to have been “comprehensive” in that it focused on educational systems and on building capacity to improve instruction from the organizational to the instructional levels. CSRD is a logical extension of that approach, and PREL is coordinating implementation of that program in the region. It has disseminated information about “models that work,” translated into languages that make the

materials accessible to people in the Pacific Region. It appears that the Lab also has built discussion of comprehensive improvement into much of its service delivery. It has included some of the “research-based” models into its own dissemination work, such as STRP from the NCREL for improvement of reading instruction.

Much of the Lab attention in the region has been focused on addressing the extremely low literacy level in the region. This documented low literacy level has been exacerbated by the poor quality of the materials for teaching literacy in English that were introduced several decades ago and by a general lack of understanding of the relationships among primary language literacy, cognitive academic language proficiency, English language proficiency, and academic growth. Other factors contributing to the low literacy rates in the region include the lack of new materials for teaching in any language, the lack of training of many of the teachers and administrators, and the severe lack of facilities. These conditions have been central to PREL’s work with the entities to develop their own capacity to meet their own needs. For some examples, the Lab has worked in a variety of ways to improve the teaching of reading in both the primary language and in English, the PEIR program brings educators from the entities to work in PREL main center for one or two years to develop their skills, the Pacific internship brings principals to Hawai‘i to job-shadow administrators who have been through extensive administrator training, and the Leadership Academy helps administrators handle special circumstances in their own organizations.

The panel was impressed that each entity is engaged, at the level most appropriate for it, in comprehensive school improvement with PREL’s assistance (for some, that means developing and implementing five-year plans, for others it is creating school improvement plans for individual schools). The importance of this work to the entities is demonstrated by the large

financial contributions some of them make to support their work with the Lab.

2. Areas of needed improvement

Some of the people interviewed indicated that they were not sure what would be done in their systems with results of work with the Lab because it depended on decisions that were made at levels in their entity above their own. Such responses may be examples of either a need to clarify audiences and the strategies for resulting in the desired changes or a need to rethink the completeness or appropriateness of the service systems that are employed.

It is clear from a long history of attempts to make significant reforms in schools that if the essential organization-level support for change is not present, the change will be very difficult to make through “bottom-up” approaches, and, if made, difficult to sustain. The Lab, through its work in several program areas, has attempted to build capacity at several organizational levels. If it expects sustained evidence of impact, it should make clear the levels of sponsorship needed for each change effort and include those levels deliberately in its plan for service.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Assess each location where services are being planned to clarify the primary customer and the conditions that probably will be required for the intended changes actually to occur. Include the results of that assessment in Lab decision-making to determine whether to engage in the partnership and to determine conditions for engagement. At least include the assessment in the planning for the overall approach for engagement with the potential partner.

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

1. Strengths

PREL, operating at 25 percent of the budget it proposed for its specialty area, has made significant contributions to the national understanding of Pacific language and culture and of issues of language and culture generally. The Lab has formed alliances with national professional organizations that recognize its expertise in these areas. The panel members thought that PREL is “breaking new ground” in research on the impact of language and culture on teaching and learning, and in establishing and maintaining productive working relationships across multiple political jurisdictions and political boundaries.

With an original focus mainly on work within its region and specialty area, the Lab has begun to provide leadership in working with SEDL and LAB, the other RELs that share its specialty area. As a result, PREL is beginning to develop a national reputation in the area. It is doing this both by producing good work that clearly addresses issues and by rejecting “quick fixes.” Examples of recent work in this specialty area include a readable research synthesis, an excellent teleconference, briefing papers that convey information to region practitioners in “digestible chunks,” and an annual pre-conference and conference that have numerous sessions focusing on language and literacy. Another important contribution is the development of materials and processes for helping parents understand that they should converse with their children in their best language and that they should work to develop thinking and analytic ability in that language.

The Lab has engaged educators from throughout the region in planning, staff development, research, and materials development in learning and reading a second language,

and it has begun steps to disseminate results throughout the region and through the other RELs with related specialty areas. An important amount of language materials has been produced in the several major languages of the region, and teachers are being trained to use these materials in instruction.

The nature of the relationship of “partner” established by many customers throughout the region with the Lab has resulted in their having a strong identity with the Lab. Those people attribute much of what they have been able to accomplish personally and professionally to that relationship.

2. Areas of needed improvement

The national recognition of the Lab seems to be at a beginning stage, emerging from a strong apparent identity with the Pacific entities other than Hawai`i. Continuing and extending efforts such as the partnerships with other RELs, affiliations with visiting scholars, partnerships with other mainland and regional service and professional organizations, and the recent teleconference can enhance the reputation further. In addition, the approaches to helping cultural groups, such as those of the entities, should be documented so that they can be disseminated along with other Lab products and services.

The panel thinks that as the Lab works to develop its reputation, it should pay particular attention to making its research reports the best they can be, including representing the most current and most generalizable literature already in the field, and making all reports meet standards that would be required for juried publication. Toward that end, the panel suggests more focus among the Lab staff on having research works published in juried media.

3. Recommendations for improvement

Continue what appears to be an emerging pattern of engagement with other mainland and

regional partners. Document and disseminate the approaches to working within different cultural settings to make educational improvements. Improve the quality of research reports, and focus on publications in juried media. All the while, recognize the significant favorable relationships between the Lab and its partners and customers and balance any changes in focus or ways of working so that the relationships are not damaged.

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

An overarching approach to work by the Lab—work with people, not for them—is one that has proved successful from the perspective of many people who have received services from the Lab. Through those careful processes, the Lab has been able to work successfully with most of the culture groups of the region. Through some of its processes, especially the R & D Cadre, methods used have made very difficult and challenging tasks and relationships accessible to a wide range of participants. The continuing engagement of the Lab with entities and agencies as partners has allowed those partners to leverage resources and take actions that they do not think would have been possible without affiliation with the Lab. An overarching effect expressed by several customers was that the Pacific Region now has an identity outside the region, including in Washington.

Furthermore, the Lab has used a relatively small award from the REL program to leverage significant resources from other sources that allow it to provide far more services of the kinds intended for the Lab than would have been possible otherwise.

On the other hand, there is an apparent need in the organization, indicated by its own self study and by difficulty responding to questions raised by the panel, to revisit the organization mission and goals to consider whether they serve well the needs of the organization. The panel

suggests revisions that clearly reflect the unique purposes of the Lab, clearly describe a vision of the region and the state of the Lab as a result of its work, and clearly specifies strategies that will be attempted to accomplish the mission.

Furthermore, the panel suggests adopting a comprehensive results-management system that corresponds to a strategic perspective. Once adopted, that perspective should be deployed throughout the organization so that all people and units think of the organization and their own positions with that perspective.

Similarly, there is an overarching need for the Lab to document its services and the impact of both its products and services. For each major product and body of work, the Lab should specify more clearly its goals, objectives, timelines, and anticipated outcomes. This clarity will enable PREL, its funders, and outside observers to be more comfortable that the appropriate balance is being reached between focus on general goals and responding to particular requests or issues that arise.

In summary, the panel thinks that PREL is an organization comprised of a high-quality staff and strong leadership that is respected in the region and valued for the products and services provided. It's main strength appears to be its ability to work effectively in the educational communities of the entities it serves and to serve as the major source of educational information for this Pacific region. Staff of the Lab both understand, and can work effectively within, the variety of educational entities and cultures found in the region, having established the necessary trust and reputation to be effective. Lab products, programs, and services are always focused on the needs of the customers, and the Lab's focus on literacy is appropriate, given the primary educational needs of the region. The establishment of Service Centers for each of the entities appears to be an important development that should improve the Lab's effectiveness.

The Lab improvement efforts should focus on developing a strategic perspective and related organization to drive its operations and decision-making. Furthermore, it should adopt systematic, formalized methods for internal and external evaluation and documentation of its products, programs, and services. In addition, as appropriate to the services provided and the expected points of impact, it should increase its collection of data relating to student performance as a routine part of its product, program, and service development. The Lab should define more explicitly its intended client and customer base, including the identification of primary and secondary clients, customers, or audiences for each product or service.

In closing, one panel member, with encouragement from others, thought it was important to make a statement about the Pacific Region and the federal Lab funding system.

As the newest region served by a dedicated Lab, the Pacific's culture, context, and challenges remain little understood by the federal government, which means that PREL has an educative task each time it proposes a program of work. (In the current proposal, 75 percent of requested funding for a specialty area in language and culture was denied because the reviewers assumed that any research in this area would be of limited relevance. But by pooling resources with other partners, the Lab has been able to address that area, and is now being recognized as a leader on the Mainland by some specialists in that field.) The "Pacific Way" is based on a paradigm of sharing and mutual assistance, rather than one of individual benefit and competition. Every other region is more culturally homogeneous than this one. Other regions have existing infrastructures that simply do not exist in the Pacific. (For example, reliable, convenient, and relatively cheap transportation and well-trained human-service providers.) Because this region is geographically vast and has comparatively few residents, PREL has been significantly under-resourced by a system that primarily uses numbers of children as the metric for allocating funds.